CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

Marion Barry 1978 Mayoral Primary Campaign Oral History Project
Interview with Richard Maulsby
Conducted by Kwame Holman

Richard Maulsby was the founding President of the Gertrude Stein Democratic Club and coordinated the key role that gay organization played in the 1978 Barry campaign. He served as Director of the Office of Motion Picture and Television Development in the Barry Administration from 1979-1984 and held a cabinet position as Director of the Office of Cable Television from 1984-1991. He went on to work at the US Patent and Trademark Office until he retired.

RM: Sure, it's Richard Maulsby. I am currently retired as we speak. This is the longest I haven't worked since I was ten years old, but I still continue to do part-time work in the area of public affairs, working with the Smithsonian, and my hope is to continue to at least do some part-time work, but I think we can say for all practical purposes I am now retired.

KH: Let's go back to when you first became aware of Marion Barry. When and under what circumstances?

RM: Well, I came here in 1969, and I came here, grew up in Nebraska, went to the University of Nebraska, went to graduate school, State University of New York at Buffalo, worked in radio and television in Nebraska and in Buffalo. I came down here to work at Channel 7 as the deputy promotion and advertising manager, and that was in 1969 and at that time Channel 7 was owned by the old *Evening Star* [DC newspaper]. One of the first things that happened after I got here, it wasn't my fault, but their license for renewal was challenged by the Black United Front. And so, that's when I first began to become aware of, obviously, the key role that the African American community plays in Washington,

DC and how its needs were not being served. So I became aware of who those key players were.

I had heard vaguely of Marion when he first ran for the school board. I knew as a gay person that he already was seen as a friend of the community because he had sponsored a resolution, whatever it is school boards do, that banned discrimination against gays and lesbians, and so that's when I first became aware of Marion. When we got Home Rule in 1974, that's when I really started to become interested politically in what was going on in the city, and, you know, I'm still not sure whether or not I voted for Marion Barry. I know the person that I was most impressed by was Del Lewis [who was also interviewed for this oral history], who was running for one of the at-large seats, as was Marion, and I'm sure I voted for Del. I just don't know whether I would have voted for Marion. I would think I would have, having been aware, the fact that he had been supportive of the gay community very, very early on. I think we should back up a little bit here, though, to talk about –

KH: Well, hang on. Before we do that, Richard, because I missed the way we want to do this, and that's to back all the way up, and let's talk about Richard. Let's talk about Nebraska and let's talk about how you came to be you and grew into adulthood and came here.

RM: Sure. Well, I grew up in a very small town in southeast Nebraska, sixty miles west of Lincoln, Fairmont, population 730; it's now down to 610. And I went to high school. I was always interested in politics at a very young age. I was Fillmore County youth chairman for John Kennedy. I went to the University of Nebraska. I worked my way through school. I was a major in speech and radio and television. And I was fortunate, I started off working at the campus radio station but I got a job working as a disc jockey,

first a rock 'n roll station, then a, what we used to call back in the day, the middle-of-the-road stations. You know, things like the Ray Conniff Singers. You'd play an instrumental, you'd play a male vocal, a female vocal, and then an instrumental, and then finally, sort of a semi-classical kind of station. And that was a rather nice way to work my way through school, I must say, if you have to work your way through school. So, then I went to graduate school at the State University.

KH: Now, were you on the air, Richard? Did you do your –

RM: Yeah, I was a disc jockey. Yeah, I did the thing, the whole –

KH: You introduced the songs and –

RM: I'd rip and read the news.

KH: And did the news.

RM: You were a combo. I mean, you ran your board. You had to have a third-class license. I did the six to midnight on the weekends, and then I would fill in for vacation when the other disc jockeys would go on vacation or somebody was sick or something like that. And then the second station I worked for, my God, I had to get up at five o'clock in the morning. I had to be on the air at five o'clock in the morning, and I worked from five until eight. I signed on for the station and then I helped with the news until eight o'clock, and then again I would work on the weekends. So, again, it was related to the kind of work I wanted to do, and at the same time it provided income for me so I could support myself while I was going to school.

I was very fortunate, tuition was very cheap at that time. I mean, when I started at the University of Nebraska it was $120 a semester, and I can't imagine what it is now. So that was good. And then I got first a fellowship at the State University of New York at

Buffalo and then I had a teaching assistantship the second year. When I got my master's degree, I went to work for the NBC affiliate in Buffalo. Then on the side, unbeknownst to the TV station I worked at a radio station, because the problem was that the TV station also had an FM station. They had an AM and FM station, and so I would work during the day at the TV station and then work at night, and I was working, God, like nine to one or something like that. I did that for a little over a year, and I was desperately seeking work elsewhere, and I interviewed here in Washington and at KDKA-TV in Pittsburgh, which at that time was owned by Westinghouse.

I took the job – sometimes I think professionally it might have been better to go with KDKA-TV because it was part of the big Westinghouse chain, the oldest radio station in the country, but this was the bigger market. I liked Washington because I continued to be interested in politics. So anyway, I took the job here, and things went south rather quickly, though, unfortunately, because the guy who hired me got fired the day I got there. Their license was challenged. And the *Evening Star* was notoriously cheap, you know. That station was a cash cow because the poor old *Star*, it had become the other paper. It once was the most prominent paper in town, but the TV station, I mean, that was their cash cow. But they were very, very cheap. But anyway, that got me to Washington.

I had come out as a gay person while I was in Buffalo, and I met this guy one night. There was a bar in Georgetown called the Georgetown Bar and Grill, right in the middle of Georgetown. People were always wandering in off the street in Georgetown, whoops, we're not in Kansas anymore. But anyway, he was involved in gay activism, the beginning of the gay activist movement here in Washington. And in 1971 when Frank

Kameny – first time we got a vote, we had the nonvoting delegate election, Frank ran as the Personal Freedom candidate. We dared not even speak our name at that time, but Frank was – and I worked in that campaign. I was the press and media guy, and it actually was very successful. He ended up sort of finishing in the top four or five, I think, and I always remembered the *Daily News* – we still had three newspapers of that time – the *Daily News* in its editorial saying, well, Frank Kameny may not have proved that gay is good – because that was Frank's big thing, and you go out to his cemetery and his plot now in the Congressional Cemetery, that's what it says on the headstone, "Gay is good." They said he may not have proved gay is good, but maybe it's not so bad after all. And I think that what happened there was that's when it – first stirrings of an awareness of, whoa, there's a gay bloc here, there's a gay community here, and they have their interests, and that also, what happened was it provided energy for the development of first the Gay Activists Alliance, and I was a member of that group. Then slowly, some of us, Paul Kuntzler [also interviewed for this oral history] and I in particular, Paul, who had always been involved in politics here in Washington, had come here in '61, drawn here by John Kennedy, he and I felt that the gay community needed to have a political arm. What GAA did was fine, Gay Activists Alliance. I mean, they demonstrated, they lobbied for legislation and all of that. But Paul and I, both being very interested in politics, what we understood was that all politicians crave three things: they obviously want your vote, but they want money and they want volunteers. And so we felt we needed to have an organization that that's just what they did. The only other organization that existed at that time was out in San Francisco. It was called the Alice B. Toklas Democratic Club.

So, in ‘74, we still were not organized in any way. We organized the Gertrude Stein Democratic Club in January of 1976. We named it Gertrude Stein and I frankly grew to regret it, because it was the sister of the Alice B. Toklas Democratic Club. And of course Gertrude Stein hated Franklin Roosevelt. She was a Republican. She was an ex-patriate left the country, you know. I mean, I think Eleanor Roosevelt or something like that might have been more appropriate. But anyway, that’s how the Gertrude Stein Democratic Club came to be born. And what had happened, we first became active in ‘76. And Paul had worked a lot with John Wilson [elected to the City Council in 1974, later was chairperson] before. John Wilson had been part of one of the slates for the Democratic Convention, I think, in ‘76 or something like that. Anyway, Paul had – and of course, we all – Paul lived in Ward 2, and we always knew we had a lot of our people in Ward 2.

And so, we supported – and we used to have our club meetings down near where the ballpark is now. That’s where all of the gay discos were, and there was a theater there called the Way Off Broadway Theater. It was part of the Lost and Found complex. And they booked acts like Peter Allen and Barbara Cook and Dorothy Collins and people that had developed a cabaret act. They were closed on Monday nights, so we had our meetings there on Monday nights, and my whole thing was, well, this ought to be fun, you know. We ought to have booze, so they’d open the bar and people could buy booze and whatever. But we just, we had a very narrow focus. We were going to let the Gay Activists Alliance handle the heavy lifting legislation. We were going to be about politics and delivering the three things. We would endorse candidates; we would provide them donations, the maximum donations allowed; we would provide them volunteers to

work in their campaign; and then we would identify our voters and make sure we got them to the polls.

KH: You were one of the first PACs. You recognized the need and efficacy of such an organization.

RM: Yeah, and I guess now – and, in fact, I think Gertrude Stein does it that way now, they do have a separate kind of PAC thing. I mean, I'm sure some of the things we did must have been illegal, but the point was we got money in their hands and we tried to make a splash of it. Well, that's when I first met Marion, would have been in 1976, and that's when I had my first correspondence with him. We endorsed him, we gave him money for his reelection campaign. We always knew that he was building for the future. That was clearly always my understanding. And I had, it was a handwritten thank-you note from Marion for a contribution. It was a personal contribution I had given in this case, and saying, "We're building for the future," which sort of amused me when Marion was writing his memoirs, just sort of playing this coy, "Well, I wasn't sure whether I was going to run or not, you know, and we were –" ba-ba-ba-ba. That was BS. I mean, clearly, that was always the plan, to take the lessons they had learned from SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, that organization and all that, and bring it to the politics and the District of Columbia.

KH: And you and other supporters knew that then. Betty King says the same thing, that she was organizing women and she knew that the plan in '74 was that Marion –

RM: Yeah, in '76.

KH: Sure, '74, '76.

RM: Well, I think even starting in '74. But in '76, that's a whole thing politicians do all the time. They want to get as much – I think he probably got the most votes of anybody running at large. I don't know that in '76, but that certainly would have been the goal, because the point was to build towards '78, and that's absolutely what they did and we were part of that. We made sure that we delivered. Paul Kuntzler and I sort of had this agreement that I would sort of be Barry's guy. I would work that and he would work John Wilson. But at the same time, Paul had a great interest in organizing at the national level with the Democratic Party and having a presence at the '76 Convention. I think it was in '76 that Mel Boozer was nominated for vice president. That was '76 or maybe it was '80. No, I think it was '76.

So, and we worked with the Greater Washington ADA, Americans for Democratic Action organization. And in fact, the first open thing I did in a gay political way was in 1974 when we had our first election for mayor, I went to the Greater Washington Americans for Democratic Action political forum and I got up and I asked Walter Washington, I said, "I am a homosexual. Do you support repeal of the sodomy law?" And I think Walter Washington never had thought about being – somebody at an open forum standing up saying, "I'm gay," and, you mean – he sort of stammered on sodomy. And of course, his opponent, who became the secretary of the army in the Carter administration – great guy [Clifford Alexander] – well, anyway, he was very dynamic, and of course right away he jumped right on it, and of course absolutely he supported it. But anyway, of course Walter went on to win and become our first elected mayor. But along with Marion in '76, I saw us as building for that bigger picture in '78 when we would elect a mayor who could really make a difference. We were very frustrated at the

city council level, I think, in terms of getting what we were seeking. [Council chairperson] Sterling Tucker was very cautious. He came to the gay pride celebration, which used to literally be a block party on Connecticut Avenue. But he came like at five o'clock in the afternoon when people were drifting away and everything. But Marion was there. He was always very out front, and I know that's what impressed me so much about him. I remember him coming out of a city council meeting and we had been frustrated by something because Sterling Tucker had been pulling strings behind the scene and tabling something. He said, "For once, we're going to do what's right." And that was the kind of go-get-'em kind of attitude that I think attracted me and a lot of other people.

But there simply was nobody on the horizon like Marion Barry at that period of time, absolutely nobody who was willing to step out front. In a way, you could argue that for somebody like John Wilson, it was a little easier. I mean, at that time it did not appear John had prospects beyond being a ward city council member. But Marion clearly had ambitions, clearly had ambitions that were citywide. It was not that wonderful committee of one hundred ministers. They certainly looked askance at us gay folk, and for somebody like Marion with his ambitions, I think that was particularly noteworthy. And I know – I mean, I never was as personally close to Marion – I mean we had a perfectly good personal relationship. I was happy to be in his administration and his cabinet and be I think the first openly gay person appointed to a cabinet-level position in the United States. But, really, Ivanhoe [Donaldson, 1978 campaign manager for Barry] is the one I always had a closer personal relationship with, and Courtland Cox [Barry friend and political supporter]. They all come out of SNCC, of course. I mean, they all got it. They

saw the parallel between what we were trying to do and what they had done with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and so there was a real simpatico there. So, we are in 1976, moving on to '78, and to me it seemed like there was no question about who we would be supporting. I mean, you know. I mean, it's just obvious. And so I really pushed us, in January of '78, to be the New Hampshire of DC politics and be the first to endorse Marion Barry. We did. I made up what the vote total was, and I would let people come in and pay a dollar to join that night just to – you know. And then I would announce, and the only person who got a vote that night other than Marion was John Ray [attorney and 1978 candidate for mayor], who of course went on, he left the campaign, endorsed Marion in the summer I guess and then went on, was endorsed in turn to run for the city council. But the vote was something like ninety-eight to one, and we very dramatically presented Anita Bonds [Barry's deputy Campaign Manager] with a check for $1,000. This is January of '78, you know. Later on, there was a politician, Doug Moore, a Methodist minister [and City Council member], he used that picture of us in a campaign because he was the only person on the council who was overtly anti-gay. I mean, he called us fascist faggots, among other things. And growing up a Methodist, I sort of particularly resent that, I guess.

KH: Which position, absent its virulence, reflected nonetheless a conservatism in the African American churchgoing community that we know existed and still exists today across the country. And so, that was a political force as well.

RM: Oh, absolutely. And yes, you're right. We still see that, and we're speaking now in 2015 and hopefully this is somebody in the twenty-second century is watching this and writing a dissertation on politics in Washington, DC in 1978. But the point is that that still

lingers. It's much less the case now, and part of it is a generational thing, of course, I think too.

KH: And as a political expert at the time, as now, Richard, would you say that those African Americans in this largely African American town at that time chose those who had, say, anti-gay feelings or lack of understanding of the gay community and its legitimate desires, were supporters of or were then starting to align and move toward a Walter Washington, a Sterling Tucker [both of whom were 1978 candidates for Mayor] candidacy?

RM: Yeah, and of course I think that's one of the reasons Marion won in '78, was that Walter Washington and Sterling Tucker split that vote. I think that's a factor. And Marion pivoted on a dime after the election and made sure he reached out to that community. Once he was elected, he did that. But yeah, I think that's true, and my sense is that that vote was split, although I would suspect that Walter Washington got a lot of it. But I don't know. I don't have that – that's for somebody else. That somebody else's oral history.

KH: Indeed. So it was January, you had the ninety-eight-to-one vote, you had been working with Ivanhoe Donaldson. How was the campaign shaping up? What was going on? It was far from a certainty that Marion Barry even was going to do particularly well. Is that fair to say?

RM: Yeah. Well, it was slow. It was slow to go. I remember Milton Coleman, a reporter at the *Post*, saying it was kind of like a Russian winter. It just sort of slow, and it – you know. And I know I went to a couple of events in Ward 3, the area of the city I lived in, with Marion, and I went to the Greater Washington ADA, had some kind of thing. But it

did develop slowly, but clearly there was a lot of work going on behind the scenes. Now, what were we doing in Gertrude Stein? We had made this big splash and everything. And I would have to say it was not until June when I said to Paul Kuntzler, I said, well, it's time, the rubber's got to hit the road. They had opened the campaign headquarters down on G Street in the old retail corridor storefront, and I said I'm going to start going down every night and delivering on the second thing, which are volunteers to work in the campaign.

What we really did during those hot summer months leading to the September primary, we basically staffed at night the phone bank. Most of the people who worked the phone bank at night were people from the gay community, and I was down there making sure people came who said they were going to come. If they didn't come, I'd get on the phone and make sure everybody had what they needed. And of course we also had people doing the stuffing the envelopes. Parallel to that, and Paul Kuntzler I think lead this effort more than I did, which was to begin to seriously look at, where are our votes, where are our voters, and targeting them to get to them. So, we ran ads in the *Washington Blade* [a gay] newspaper. We did leafleting at all the bars, particularly on the weekends. That was another thing. I'd work on getting our people to, all right, take a little time off on Saturday night and Friday night and go on down to where all the people are driving in to spend the night at the clubs in Southeast, and leaflet them.

We worked with the business community for the first time. We got the owners of several of the most popular bars to hold fundraising events. The Eagle held $100-a-plate dinner for Marion during the summer. Bill Oates, who was an officer of the Gertrude Stein Democratic Club and owned several male-oriented businesses, I'll just leave it at that,

down where second base is now at Nats Park, Bill did a number of things in his establishments, but gave generously himself, and worked with other people in the business community that he knew to do things. So, again, I think this was sort of – our theory was this is what the gay community needs. Politicians, sure, we hope they'll do the right thing, but let's give them another incentive, which means, hey, there's a voting bloc here that we need to take into account. And so, we delivered on those three things. So, sort of the '78 campaign I think from the gay community's perspective for Marion Barry, it was the test run of what our theory had been, and I think it's fair to say in retrospect that it, in fact, did work, that we provided obviously the financial, and got other people in the community to support it. We definitely provided volunteers on Election Day and phone banking. And then I think really importantly, we, for the first time, made an effort to identify who our voters were, where they were, and we targeted them. And then after the election, Paul Kuntzler did this brilliant presentation, which he first did to the Gertrude Stein Democratic Club at our first meeting after the September primary, and then subsequently he and I took Milton Coleman from the *Post* to the Eagle for lunch and he made this presentation. And it showed this map, the precincts where Marion did the best. You could trace that to the gay vote as it compared to other precincts where there would not be gay people. Paul Kuntzler has done a much better job, I think, of explaining this elsewhere in the oral history. It really was his thing, and the *Post* published it in the front page. And I've always believed that that's what really literally put us on the map. As a newsman yourself, you know the *Washington Post* sets the news agenda in this town, still does. And having it there, that really validated it.

Now, let's just say, though, that it's easy now to look back, and Marion himself told me this. He writes about it in his book. Others who have participated in this oral history have said that. But it was not necessarily accepted at the time. I can remember when Paul made the presentation at the Gertrude Stein Democratic Club. By the way, Marion Barry never came to the Gertrude Stein Democratic Club, asked us for our support. Anita Bonds is the only person who ever came to the club meeting, and then Betty King came to the meeting right after the primary, when we all were basking in the glow of this great success. And it's interesting, I do remember Betty saying when Paul did the – "Well, you know, you can take numbers and you can do different things with them," whatever. You know, there's a little bit of skepticism. I don't want to – I'm appreciative of the fact that looking back now people give all the credit in the world, but the fact of the matter is it still was not the coolest thing in the world to be sort of out there, to have gay people – you know. It was a very, very, very different time than it is in the twenty-first century and it was even later on.

But, in fact, I think that reinforces the fact of how ahead of his time Marion Barry was, how he really was out there. He took a stand. He took a stand, you know? And he was not – and he really did feel it was right. I know he really felt it was right, and that's why I was sorry very, very late in life when he, for whatever reason, chose to – he was the only person on the city council that voted against marriage equality. And when I went out and interviewed for him for his book, at the end I said, "Well, you know, Marion, some people evolve in terms of this issue. Our president, Barack Obama. Others regress." And he said, "Oh, Richard, no, you're right." He says, "I really feel bad about that. I really would like to do something to make up for it." Well, he never got that

opportunity, unfortunately. But still, his heart was in the right place and I think that it was extraordinary that somebody as ambitious as he was would be willing to openly embrace the community, accept its support, and so I think that's a good thing.

But also, there has to be a certain perspective about where we were then as opposed to where we are now in the twenty-first century vis-à-vis the community. It wasn't considered – there were downsides to accepting the gay community. That ended in the District of Columbia, I think, in the last decade of the twentieth century, and when we got openly gay members elected to the city council. But '78 was a seminal moment, I believe strongly, for the gay community. I think you can go back, I like to do this analysis, you go back and look at the advertising in the *Washington Blade* before the election in '78, look at it a year later, and advertisers, oh, hey, there's a – never underestimate the fact that the *Post* put that map, Paul Kuntzler's map, on the front page. It might have been the metro section, I don't know, but it still was – and I think it was above the fold. Well, maybe it was below the fold.

But anyway, the point is I think that not only was that '78 election so important for our city, I think we were a much different city after '78 than we would have been had Walter Washington continued as mayor or Sterling Tucker been elected mayor. And I think what Marion did in terms of opening up the city, making people part of the government who had not been part of before, women, certainly his whole minority business effort, that just – you know, just extraordinary. And I think that, for that, for nothing else, he will go down as one of the greatest mayors that we ever had in this city.

KH: So to the extent, Richard, that candidate Barry in '78 did not feel fully that it was in his interest to herald 100 percent his support from the gay community, did you understand

that as a political professional with respect to the downside you mentioned, and did that and other things make selling him to the gay community, selling him to a community that may not have been as involved politically, community members who may not have been involved politically as you were, a difficult thing?

RM: Well, I don't think so, certainly in '78. I think some issues began to emerge in '82, and certainly after '82, I mean, that was over. But I think it's compared to what? And I think, what were our expectations at that time? I mean, I don't believe there – there was simply nobody else on the horizon, given the options, and nobody had ever done what Marion had done. I mean, he came openly to the gay pride celebration. We did two big fundraisers in the seventies, one tied to – we did an Anita Bryant roast. She is the one who, the former Miss America contestant who had a singing career, was a spokesperson for Florida orange juice, and she campaigned against the gay rights ordinance in [Miami] Dade County and really became the face of that very homophobic, anti-gay –

KH: Nationally.

RM: Yeah. And we did a fundraiser to support the effort down there, and Marion came to that. When Leonard Matlovich [the first gay service member to purposely out himself to the military] bravely came out and was on the cover of *Time* magazine, a sergeant in the United States Army who came out gay and was discharged and famously said, "You know, they gave me a metal for killing a man and they threw me out of the army for loving a man." And Marion was there for us in that effort. He supported gay pride resolutions on the city council. I mean, he was just far and away the leader. And others came after him. Because of what he did, it was easier for other people to do that.

And then you start to get into more nuanced area. You know, well, we have other options now. But Marion was not – and certainly not in terms of 1978, there was no difficulty whatsoever in selling Marion, and that goodwill continued for the most part into the '82 election as well. We had good strong support for Marion in '82. And I think by '82, things were a little more open and embracing. We obviously had become this much larger coalition than Marion put together. We started having Gertrude Stein Democratic Club banquets every year, and Marion always came to those. He was at the head table, he always spoke. Effi [Barry's second wife] came.

Effi, by the way, was always a big, big supporter of the community and very popular, and was a real asset for Marion in terms of the gay community. By the way, you notice, I have this problem. I'm from the old school, I call it the gay community. GLBT [Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender] stuff does not trickle off my tongue easily. Frank Kameny said, "Gay is good." He didn't say, "GLBT is good."

KH: And E.

RM: And not to say that it's not, but I mean it's just that – so, for me, I know it's easy, I just say the gay community.

KH: Absolutely. So, June of '78, momentum is picking up. What was going on then? What were you thinking about the chances this maverick candidate actually would pull it off and how it would go?

RM: Yeah. It was kind of like, well, I'm going to do this because it's the right thing to do, we should do it. But I was used to backing losers. (Laughter) And I don't know; that was the perceived wisdom, which obviously continued right up until the end. Sterling tried to get Marion to drop out of the race. I think the *Washington Post* endorsement obviously

was very, very important. I mean, not only once, but twice, a vote for Marion Barry is a vote for Marion Barry. And I think that that was one of the key factors in the election. The coming-of-age of gay support was a factor, the *Washington Post* was a factor, but all the lessons that Marion and Ivanhoe had learned in their civil rights days. And the other thing is very important, the effort to register new voters. And that, I think, is generally seen as a flaw in the polling, was that they did not take into account new voters who had registered.

So, I think those were really – it was just a brilliantly executed campaign, it really was. And it was the most satisfying thing that I've ever been involved in politically, and obviously professionally it turned out to be a good thing for me. And, you know, there are people who I encountered and encountered me, that otherwise we never would have, our paths never would have crossed. And we remain a close-knit group today, and that's why we've come together for this oral history project, is an example. But that's just the fact of the matter, you know. But these are people that are close friends to this day and we still get together, and that's just a wonderful experience. And dammit, it was good for the city.

KH: What was election night like, that primary night, the de facto election?

RM: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I guess I started to feel a little better about things after the *Post* endorsement and things and then – but I think even the last poll was not good, as I recall it. So I was – with trepidation we did our work, getting our people out at the polls, and I'm not sure whether I worked that day. I don't think I worked that day. And then that night, I had dinner with Paul Kuntzler and his partner Steve Miller and my partner, Richard Lefante, and I had a portable radio with me which had an earpiece in it, and we

went over to the Harambee House for the – and I was hearing the results and things were looking good and people were starting to get excited and all of that, and then Marion came down and happiness reigned. I was not in the suite, but we were on the floor and as excited as could be.

And I think Paul, right away, he started working on that analysis of the vote, and I'm sure he could do a much better, more sophisticated job now with the tools that we have, but again, it was really a very important thing to do, I think, because it helped to show what our impact had been. Oh, but it was great, very exciting. Yeah, it was totally cool. Totally cool, yeah, yeah.

KH: Now, I want to talk about the first year and wrap it up. But the impressive thing that we've all talked about many times is that any so-called group could claim legitimately that that group comprised the 3,500 votes that were the difference in the election, and you could say young people, you could say poor African Americans, you could say the new voters you just mentioned. You could say white voters in Ward 3 who were older. You could say the gay community. What do you make of that reality that that's what happened?

RM: Well, I think, you know, victory has a thousand mothers or whatever, and defeat – I wouldn't challenge any of that. I mean, I've never – the '78 election is important to the gay community in the city, because it did put us on the map. It showed that we could provide political muscle. And so, in addition to doing what's right, there's a reason you should be doing it because these people are a political force. We did provide key support for Marion that mirrored things that they were doing. I mean, we registered voters in the bars for the first time. We identified our voters and got them to the polls. So, yeah, in a

tight election like that, I think you can point – my own personal view is the three key factors were bringing new voters into the system for the first time, the support of the gay community, and the *Washington Post* endorsement. And, of course, just the organizational expertise that Ivanhoe brought to it, and Marion, and again, based on their experience.

But, you know, you're right. In an election that's that close, you could point to anything. But I do think that, as I look at it, and of course we have now, what, forty years as we speak almost, that, to me, that's what I would draw from that election. And then we also had a very good candidate who did well, I think, in the debate. There was one debate that I remember, and I think he did well in that, and my recollection is that Marion – was Marion in the middle? I think he was, yeah. From a visual, it looked good in terms of where he was. So, I mean, that's certainly another factor. But I think, really, at the end of the day all I can do is I can tell the story from my perspective of what we did and how I think it related, and who cares. What difference does it make? He won. (Laughter)

KH: That's well put. So, as you look back on that first year, that first administration, what did you do and what was happening around you?

RM: Well, there was a lot of excitement I think because Marion obviously is going to bring new people in, fresh people in. They recruited Elijah Rogers to be the city administrator, clearly a dynamic guy, an interesting personality. His first announcements were he brought in women, were part of that. I had a conversation with Ivanhoe at the campaign headquarters, I think maybe in October, after the primary, and he said, "You know, I was thinking that we should bring maybe you and Paul Kuntzler into the administration in some way." And I said, "Well, you know, Paul really is not particularly interested in

that." I mean, he wanted to be on the Democratic State Committee and that's where he went. He had a job that he loved and was very good at.

I was a little more loosey-goosey, but I had a specific thing that I was interested in, and this was based on my experience as a video producer working not only at Channel 7 but other places in DC that shooting in Washington was a real problem, and that we should have a film office to cut the red tape and to facilitate things, to bring the money in and so on. So I put together a paper on it, and as it happened – what happened? The place I was working at that time, it had federal money, which is lost, and I was unemployed. So in September, Betty King was going in to see Marion about some board commission matters and she goes into the office and she says, "Before we talk about this, I want to talk about Richard Maulsby." And he said, "What's wrong?" And she said, "Well, Richard needs a job, and he does have this idea for something that we need." And in fact, I think Marion had even introduced legislation to create a film office when he was on the council, which went nowhere.

So, the wheel started rolling and Marion did an executive order that created the Film Office, and I went to work in the Office of Business and Economic Development. I mean, I've really been fortunate in my three government career jobs to start something that didn't exist. It was a piece of paper. And I made it – we were very successful. That was in 1979. I continued in that capacity until June of '84, when Marion made me the executive director of the Office of Cable Television. Again, all I had to start with is the act and a phone and a tenacious relationship with Bob Johnson [founder of BET, Black Entertainment Television] and his group in terms of negotiating the franchise agreement

and all of that. But, again, to start something from scratch, and I continued in that capacity until Marion left in 1990.

Then I went into the Clinton administration and had a wonderful job that continued for almost twenty years, and again I was in positions where I was starting something from the very beginning, and you don't often get that chance in government. So that first year, I came in late, not till September, but just very exciting, being around people and meetings, because you felt you were doing something important. You really did. And to be reunited with lots of people I had worked in the campaign for. It was really an exciting, exciting time. And I think the whole first term was very exciting, and my portfolio expanded a bit because I got involved in the Communication Office and I worked on some committee to promote Washington kinds of things and did some other things in the Office of Business and Economic Development, some of the exciting things that were being done there. So, yeah, it was cool. It really was an exciting time. Exciting time, yeah.

KH: What was your first movie you brought to town?

RM: Oh, God. Really some clunkers, I've got to tell you. I think the first movie might have been *Raise the Titanic*. But, you know. I think Jason Robards was in that movie. All the movies are terrible, I think.

KH: As it happened.

RM: Just as it happens, yeah. I mean, well, *First Monday in October*, which was based on the stage play, that was very interesting. I remember for whatever reason they ended up shooting the scene where they arrive at the Supreme Court the first Monday in October in January, bitterly cold day, and they all had to get out like it's still October. I remember

being asked to pick up the leaves in Georgetown in October because they were here shooting in October, but the movie opens in the summer so we couldn't have these leaves, and then put them back down for the other scene, so that was fun.

There was the guy, Mr. T, and he was in a movie – Joel Schumacher, who did the *Batman* films, was the director. Very great guy. And they basically camped here in town for several weeks, but the movie, it ended up I think being called *D.C. Cab*, but they wanted to name it *Capital Cab*, I think, which is an actual company. And I remember going out to meet with the board, these wonderful African American gentleman, and I knew we were in a lot of trouble when they opened the meeting with a prayer and then they started discussing the script, "Well, I just don't know that we can –" And I was doing my thing, "Well, you know, this is very important to our city and the mayor strongly supports – it's good money and jobs," and (mumbles).

Well, they ended up changing the name of the movie. (Laughter) That was the last movie that I worked on. But I think it was *Raise the Titanic*, was the first one that I worked on. And, oh, the fun one was with Buck Henry, who was a great guy, and that's when we used the city council chamber as the Supreme Court. I forget. What was that movie called? Bob Newhart was in it. But Buck Henry was a wonderful guy. That was a fun thing, yeah.

KH: Just two more things I want to touch on with you, Richard, on behalf of everybody. One is to get you to see if you can remember what you promised me and those sitting in Betty [King]'s sitting room, you would be sure to mention that piqued you, angered you a little bit, that somebody made a claim that you thought – perhaps you won't remember it, but there was something you said that there's a perception that this person did something.

RM: I thought I was talking about this sense that everybody from the get-go thought that the gay community made this major contribution and that there were those who, at arm's length –

KH: Discounted.

RM: – in the camp, discounted it, and discounted Paul's map, that, oh, well, you know, you can –

KH: Very good. I think that is right. I think that is it.

RM: That's the one thing that I felt. I mean, it has come down as the perceived wisdom now, but at the time people didn't, and that's okay. I mean, we all have to sit back, and perspective and time, we have a better analysis of what went on. But I think it's important to understand. I think it's important for people to understand that there was a time, even in this city, this most liberal of cities, where it wasn't considered the coolest thing in the world to be a gay person. I mean, the prejudice was still there. And in '78, we certainly had the long ways to go in '78, and that's not even getting into the whole impact of the AIDS crisis, which, I will say this. I always say it's a terrible thing to say, but the blessing of it was I think it truly did advance the cause of human rights for the gay, lesbian – I'll go that far – community, that, it did, it brought people out of the closet. It made these white upper-middle-class guys in the suburbs who just wanted to go off to the disco and dance, suddenly their friends are getting ill, it got them involved as activists and it made it possible for the Human Rights Campaign Fund to really grow and expand and have its own building and everything.

But that really – I found when Leonard Matlovich came out, that that provided a new energy, because there were people who had been in the military and they could really

relate to him. And then the thing about Anita Bryant, which was so – I mean, this whole thing that you couldn't teach if you were gay in Dade County, and then just so blatantly prejudiced and homophobic, that caused an energy, but nothing like the crisis, the AIDS crisis. That took it to the whole next level, I think. And again, it's probably a terrible thing to say, but that is the one silver lining in all of that, is that I think it really did – that provided a tremendous boost for the gay and lesbian community.

KH: The only other thing, and it's about this group that is supporting this oral history, and it seems to me one of the reasons I heard people wanted to do this is the perception that there is such a misperception about this person and his impact and what he did because of how he ended and what happened to him famously, and that being the only way he became really known to so many people in the country. And in fact, we heard it on Friday, Diane [Lewis, member of the group doing this oral history] and I, at the Historical Society, and someone said that there had been another event at the Society where there was supposed to be about the Barry legacy and it was all very negative and so forth. I wanted to get your take on that, and I wonder if it's just part of the fact that we don't teach history of any kind very well.

RM: Well, you know, I wonder that. That's a good question. I mean, do they teach, in the District of Columbia, do they teach the history of DC, or a modern history of DC? I know in Nebraska, I took a Nebraska history course, but I don't know that it was a requirement or anything, and I certainly didn't get anything like that in high school. That was at the college level. But I think that's important, I really do, and I hope that this provides a resource that will be used. And, to me, this is the start. We're focusing on the

campaign, lesser extent maybe the first year. But I think it's important, certainly, to try to provide a different perspective on Marion's record.

Another thing I didn't touch on is the jobs program. One of the last people I hired when I was still working full time at the United States Patent and Trademark Office was a young woman who's a graphic artist who said, "Oh, I got my first job from Marion Barry when I was –" And that really was important. And I know whenever I had young people coming in and working for me in the Cable Office or the Film Office, I always tried to make sure that they got something important to do, something at the end of their weeks there. And unfortunately, that's not always the case. You know, I'll go make a copy of this or whatever. And I did, and that's a problem we had in the federal government too. But I always tried to make sure, okay, this is your project for the six weeks. At the end of the six weeks, this will be done, and then maybe you'll do some other things we want you to do.

But I think that there's just a lot of good there, in terms of entrepreneurship in the African American community, the whole outreach to small minority businesses, the summer jobs program, the development. I mean, that only happens if you've got an administration that's really pushing that kind of thing. The whole promotion of the city. So there's a good, positive story to tell. Unfortunately, Marion did not do himself any favors with his memoir. I think there's yet to be a good book written. I hope somebody uses this project as part of their effort to write a good history of Marion Barry. Now, I guess we're going to get a movie now, aren't we? Is HBO doing that, or –I hope somebody good is – is Spike Lee [African-American film director] –

KH: Eddie Murphy [African-American film star] and Spike Lee reportedly are examining the prospect.

RM: Yeah. But I know just from my experience with the Film Office how these things go, you know. They get these things started and then they lose the director and then they lose the star. Eddie Murphy is one of the people that movies get done if he commits to it. It's a tough thing. But there's that, but then I don't know whether I – we'll see how many – I would like to see a good book. I think that the book that Tom Sherwood [former reporter at *Washington Post* and NBC 4] is a cowriter on was a good effort, and I guess there's been a revised, updated version which I have not seen, but I still feel that Marion deserves somebody to come along and write his story and the unique contributions he made to our city, so I hope it happens.

KH: Absolutely. Thanks, Richard.

RM: Okay.

[End of interview]

Commented [RM1]: The transcript of this interview was proof read for grammar spelling etc by Richard Maulsby on February 15, 2018.